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Diving: One Couple's Rejuvenating Recreation

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The world is full of changes. Some that make our lives better, some that only tempt us into believing they will. And so, the old adages remain true: Be careful. Tread lightly. Look before you leap. For if history has taught us anything, it's that our time and energy are precious. And change for change's sake is rarely worth the effort.

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MISSISSIPPI Star

VOL.2 NO. 8 APRIL 1998

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Cover photo: Jo Vaughn 120 feet down on Coral Reef "Punta Sur"

VALUES AND TRADITIONS MAKE A FAMILY

by Glenda Singleton Beal

Watching the movie *Soul Food* brought back memories of our family gatherings and especially our holidays. Thinking about those times also reminded me of why those times stick out so vividly now in my mind. It was at those times in very subtle ways family values are reinforced and imparted to the next generation; it is through those traditions that we find joy, create memories and celebrate our lives.

by Glenda Singleton-Beal

Often, because of the hustle and bustle of today's society, we fail to continue those traditions and therefore fail to pass on the values that our parents and grandparents held dear. What can we do to reconnect with those values, our children, our families and friends? We can relive some of those old traditions but we can also create some new ones that best address our current societal demands.

When my daughter was a child, we as a family had several daily rituals which we believed important, which included: having breakfast together each morning, enjoying dinner together at a set table every evening, having discussions every day about what had occurred, reviewing home work everyday, bathing every night and praying before bed. Sounds pretty basic, doesn't it? But far too many young people have not enjoyed basic routines and have grown up without a sense of being grounded. These simple habits create a sense of discipline, order, limits and a sense of love that children need.

Those simple basic practices also in very subtle ways reinforced the values that we believed were important. Those values included: family is important, so family time was important; studying and education are important, so doing home work and talking about school was the daily routine; talking and communicating are important, so expressing one's ideas and sharing them was acceptable, expected and encouraged; eating balanced meals is important, so eating a home-cooked meal together as a family was the practice, cleanliness is important, so bathing every night was the rule; giving thanks to God is important, so doing so with each meal

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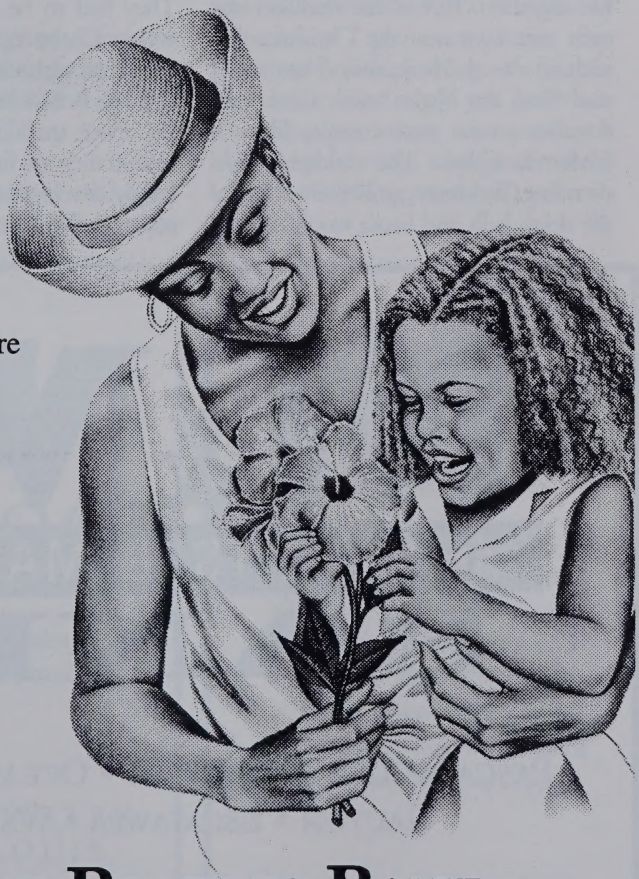

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and each night before going to bed was the practice.

Living a ways from home, also challenged us in having large family gatherings, particularly during the holidays. We created new traditions; one that has always brought back great memories is our Chicago Christmas Eve tradition. We enjoyed this for seven years. Several families rotated hosting a Christmas Eve celebration with and for our children. What made the time so special was each year we did some of the same things: we ate, drank, exchanged gifts, sang and had fun together. Part of the tradition was each year, I sat near the Christmas tree with all the children around me and I read Twas the Night before Christmas. Another parent read excerpts from A Christmas Carol. The children would then sing Christmas carols; then we'd hear the sleigh bells and Santa would appear; he'd come in and have a snack with the children and then each child sat on Santa's lap to talk about his or her wishes. (Of course, I also took the opportunity to sit on Santa's lap to make my wishes known, and the children were always amused by this). The children were so excited; and as Santa left he reminded them to obey their parents, eat their vegetables, go to bed early and he'd take care of the good boys and girls; finally, we ended the evening at midnight Mass. As the children grew older they were given more responsibilities for the Christmas eve celebration. They had to be creative and come up with a Christmas program, to entertain the adults with songs, plays and skits.

I do believe in family and obviously I am about traditions and values. I do believe they are fundamental for healthy family development and successful well adjusted children. And how do we get

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there from where ever we are today? First, you must decide what you really think is important to you and your family. Second, you must prioritize the most important things. Third, you must plan how to create the environment. Finally, you must take the time. Families need quite a few ingredients to prosper and grow. These basic ingredients are:

a) love and time, which are similar to the sun and water to a flower.
b) values and traditions, which are similar to the earth and minerals to a flower.
c) order and discipline, which are similar to schedules for watering, pruning and rotation to the light for a flower.

I can also tell you what is not important to creating a healthy family. It is not important to be well educated; it is not important to have a lot of money; it is not important to have a lot of material things. Often times, however, we let these material items and excuses stand in the way of achieving what is really important for our families.

Finally, after all is said and done, what is most important in establishing values and creating healthy families is not what is said, not what is preached, not what is taught; most important to imparting values and establishing healthy families is what you hear the young people say, "you must walk the talk", or "you must lead by example", or " you must practice what you preach". I think you get the picture. No matter how much you believe in something, no matter how much you expound your values, until you live those values in everything you do you are merely talking. MS

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Letters

Dear Maurice,

I really enjoy reading the *Mississippi Star,* especially the book summaries. I don't read much, but I do like to take a break from my busy day and go to the library and get a book and read about my people and how they struggled so that we can have better things in life - if we so choose.

After I read the books, I let my fifteen-year-old niece read them. She loves to read.

Thanks for keeping us informed, especially a small time reader like myself and a big, big-time reader like Eboni.

Goldie and Eboni
Bay St. Louis, MS

Mr. Singleton,

I look forward to getting the *Mississippi Star* every month. Although I don't know many people on the Gulf, I feel that I have met many through the *Mississippi Star.* It is very informative. Many thanks to my daughter (Karen Frederic) for introducing it to me by a first year subscription.

Zelma Carter
Topeka, Kansas

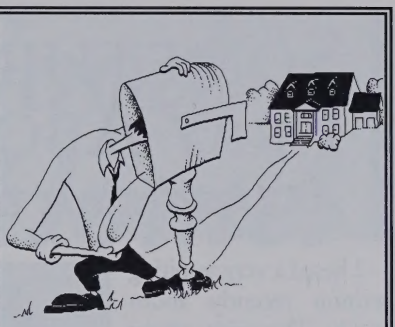
Dear Maurice,

I am glad that I happened to meet you yesterday and that you presented me with the past two issues of *Mississippi Star.* I read them both last night with great interest and congratulate you on the focus and format of the magazine. I can only imagine the difficulties involved in publishing something new and first-class in the field of journalism, and I wish you ever-increasing success.

I was particularly impressed by the tribute to Vernon Dahmer, Sr. and by Clementine Williams' reminders of such outstanding Bay St. Louis citizens as Louis Piernas, Joseph Labat, Richmond Barthe', Geraldine Lang, and her own father, Douglas Williams. You are too young to remember deMontluzin Drug Store, founded here in 1878 and swept away by Hurricane Camille in 1969, but I recall that on two occasions I took Mr. deMontluzin, my father-in-law, then in his nineties, for a visit with his old friend Louis Piernas. They both enjoyed sitting on the porch and talking of the events and people of their youth and of the yellow fever epidemic that raged on the Coast while Mr. Piernas was postmaster.

Again I offer my best wishes to you and to the magazine.

Sincerely yours,
Emily de Montluzin
Bay St. Louis, MS



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Letters to the Publisher

should be 100 words or less.
Star Calendar: Events of interest to South Mississippians should be submitted on your organization's letterhead, specifying the date, time, place of event and a number of contact. Submissions should be received by the twentieth day of the preceding month.
Be sure to include a daytime telephone number.

Mail submissions to
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Mississippi Star reserves the right to refuse or decline to publish any submission.

Something To Pray About
A Tradition of Family

by Stacy James Mackey

I heard a very inspiring sermon recently about family. The scripture text was Psalms 127:3: "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward." Oftentimes in life, we think that we are blessed by wealth or the possessions money has afforded us. We fall into the trap of basing our prayers and wants on things of this world such as cars, clothes and homes, when actually, the biggest blessings are the branches of our own family trees.

Passion plants a seed in the womb of a woman and by the miracle of life, that seed evolves and becomes a precious baby. How excited people are as they peer through the window of the hospital nursery at the sight of another womb's reward.

If you gather a bunch of parents in a room, undoubtedly someone will share a story of something their child has done. Others will laugh because they can relate or have a story of their own to tell. Five years ago, I would never have imagined that I would be happy having children. We see someone with undisciplined children (Be Be's kids) and we make assumptions that children are not for us. But when you hold a child in your arms and experience their unyielding love, it's a feeling that all the world's successes cannot match. It's up to us as adults and parents to nurture, praise and discipline that child to adulthood. It's not an easy process, but God never promised us that everything in life would be easy. The movie *Soul Food* chronicled a family whose bonds were tested through trials and ultimately the loss of the matriarch. When it was all said and done, "the family" is what everyone rallied around. Think about every special moment that has happened in your life whether it was a graduation, a marriage, a job promotion or even just a holiday, that moment was not complete without someone from your family being there.

All of us are children of someone and we can carry on that tradition when we give birth to another. Scripture says that a person is blessed when they are "like a tree planted by the rivers of waters..." Does your family tree stand tall and strong as an oak? Try counting each branch as a blessing and praise the fruit produced by that tree. I hope I've given you something to pray about.

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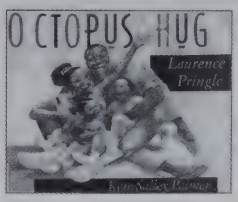


Octopus Hug

(Published by Caroline House, Boyds Mills Press, Inc. 1993) by Laurence Pringle with illustrations by Kate Salley Palmer is a terrific story about family and the power of the imagination. A resourceful father turns toddler squabble into incredible play that helps them wind down before going to bed. Colorful and exciting, perfect bedtime reading for parents with toddlers.

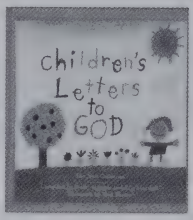
Children's Letters to God

(Workman Publishing New York 1991) compiled by Stuart Hample and Eric Marshall provides perspective of the innocence of children. You may find the letters to be humorous, but they will certainly remind you of yourself as a young child. One of my favorites:

Dear God,

Thank you for the baby brother but what I prayed for was a puppy

Joyce



Say Amen!

The African American Family's Book of Prayers (Penguin Books 1997) by Rev. Chestina Mitchell Archibald is a collection of prayers for many of situations we encounter in life by a host of ministers, activists, educators, actors, poets and recognizable historical personalities. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Mary McLeod Bethune, Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, Frederick Douglass, Malcolm-Jamal Warner and Kim Fields-Freeman are only a few of the contributors along with Rev. Chestina Mitchell Archibald.

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Students Helping Students

by Jeanie Lunsford

Moss Point High senior Sabrina Bailey helps second grader Kentarius Scott get up and running on a computer-reading program at West Elementary. Sabrina is one of 50 students in Moss Point High's new Class Facilitator Program. The program pairs older and younger students for one-on-one mentoring. It gives high school students an opportunity to discover if they want to pursue a career in education, while helping younger students master new subjects.

Students interested in careers in education are getting hands-on experience at Moss Point Schools.

Moss Point High English teacher Michele Rice supervises 50 high school students in a Class Facilitator Program she developed this year. These students serve as peer tutors at five Moss Point Schools. They also act as assistants in order to enable teachers to provide more personalized instruction.

This peer tutoring program is part of the high school's new Learning Resource Center funded in large part by an Inter-national Paper Edcore grant Rice wrote last year.

According to Rice, the class facilitators have had a good first year. "They tutor other high school students, as well as younger children," said Rice. During the first semester, they tutored students who had previously failed the Functional Literacy Exam (FLE). Of those that received peer tutoring, 80 percent passed, compared to a 46 percent passing rate for those without peer tutors.

Students that work with elementary children at West, Charlotte Hyatt, Kreole, Escatawpa and East Park elementaries, or at Ed Mayo Junior High, are assigned to the HOSTS

(Help One Student to Succeed) labs. These students serve as one-on-one reading tutors or tutor non-HOSTS participants in any subject the younger student finds difficult.

According to Moss Point High senior Brian Goode, "The program's greatest strength is the outreach program. I personally work with third graders and their faces light up when I walk into the room sometimes. I believe they are just 'tickled pink' that a high school student is in their class."

Peer tutoring is a good training ground for future teachers. "You find out if you like teaching or if it's not for you," said Rice. One of her students wants a career working with learning disabled children. Rice was able to place her in a special education class at an elementary school and says that is has been a great experience.

Rice believes the best thing about peer tutoring is that both the facilitator and the youngster receiving help learn from the experience. Her student facilitators agree.

Rice believes the best thing about peer tutoring is that both the facilitator and the youngster receiving help learn from the experience.

"I have learned to become a more analytical thinker," said high school senior Willie Wilkes. "I have learned to be more understanding of others."

This program supports a number of the district's goals. It helps ensure that any child who needs additional help can receive it and provides older students with enrichment opportunities - two key aspects of the district's five-year strategic plan. Finally, it meets one of the strategic plans top objectives" to have students gain such a high degree of mastery in each subject that they can teach others what they have learned. MS

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DIVING:
One Couple's Rejuvenating Recreation

BY MAURICE SINGLETON, JR.

Eddie and Jo Vaughn are a scuba diving team. Certainly, they are a couple; in fact they will celebrate the tenth anniversary of their marriage later this year. After talking with the two of them recently about their scuba diving adventures, it is very clear that they are a team, growing together.

Jo and Eddie between dives off the Cozumel, Mexico Coast.

Eddie has always been an outdoors, adventurous kind of person. Prior to meeting Eddie, Jo, on the other hand, was more of a - self-proclaimed - "indoors" kind of person."I never played any sport," explained Jo. "I hardly went outside to play as a kid. I sat inside and read and watched TV. I never played baseball or basketball. Nobody could hardly believe it when I went diving. I couldn't believe it myself."

"Jo can dive now!" Eddie assertively exclaims. "She can go. She and I bring in the whole ocean by ourselves. In Bonaire we just take the truck and go. She stumbled around a little bit at first, but once she got the hang of it ... We talked a lot, too. When she was being trained by instructors, I never said a word. After the instructors had trained her, then we could talk about things. She'd go with me and my friends. That's how she came along really good and fast. She was diving with men who were diving a lot."

Jo was a spectator on a trip to St. Petersburg, Florida when she got her first thirst of desire to dive. "When I saw all the beautiful blue water - and he was out there diving - I said to myself, 'I think I'm going to try this and see what it's like.'"

"Jo is my diving my buddy," said Eddie. "She's my wife, but that doesn't make her my diving buddy. She's my diving buddy because we dive together.

"Now that she'll go with me, she gets to experience the stuff that I always wanted somebody else to be able to see. She can share that with me and she can tell other people about the different stuff we see, and that's like tops to me. When I can get deep on a wall, and I am experiencing something that's out of this world, and I turn around and see her

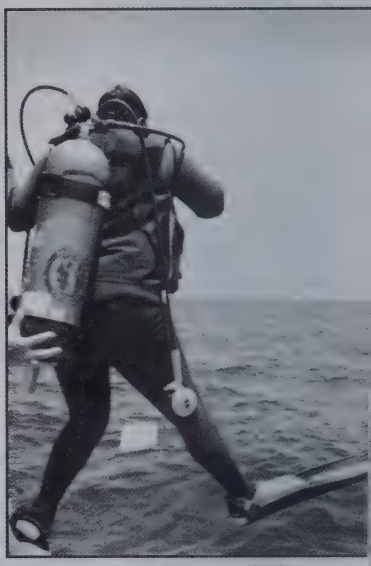
right there and she's experiencing the same thing. I don't have to say, 'You should've been there.' I just turn around and she's right there, and that's the greatest feeling in the world.

"I always wanted someone else to experience the things we've been talking about," explained Eddie who has logged more than 200 dives over the past twenty-plus years. "I could never get anybody interested in doing something like this with me, so I always went off and did it by myself."

"Underwater is a world you can't explain to anybody," Jo explains. "You have to be there to know what I would be talking about. You can't explain it. It's totally different. It's a world of its own."

"When you sink down in crystal-clear water, and you see sixty to eighty feet, and you see the reef, Man, there's nothing like it in the whole world," Eddie explained. "You're coming down in slow motion like a paratrooper, just gliding down like a flying squirrel."

"It's different everytime you go down," said Jo. "You might come upon a big sea turtle; you rarely see them in the water; or different kinds of fish you haven't seen before. It's all beautiful down there."



Jo, making a "giant stride" boat entry off of Pensacola, Florida during a diving and deep sea fishing trip.

"And it's not threatening," added Eddie. "You are the most threatening animal there. And even though you're talking sharks, you are the most threatening animal there. There are places in the world where those types of dangers (shark attacks) exist. Any place that I have ever been, I have never seen anything like that or knew of any types of threats to anybody when we were in the water on a dive trip.

"I think it was mostly through the TV that I was pretty much afraid of sharks and sea creatures," explained Eddie. "But I was a scuba diver, so I just made up my mind that I wasn't going to be afraid of sea creatures. But, above that, I've learned that the sea creatures are no threat to me. So, mostly dealing with a real bad current might be a factor."

At the Red Slave Di near the Coast of Ven huts that line both si where slaves

The Educational Angle

Eddie and Jo make at least two dives a year together, traveling to Cozumel, Bonaire, the Bahamas or any of several other places. Both agree that Cozumel, Mexico - primarily because of the variety of dives and the reefs there - is by far their favorite diving vacation get away.

"We've been to different places that people have said are better than Cozumel," sai

Eddie, "but I haven't found that to be true. I like Cozumel the best."

"We like it so much there because we've gone so many times," explained Jo. "And we dive with the same dive operation each time we go. And when we walk in they smile and greet you, and they remember your name. They look forward to seeing you."

Eddie entering from the shore at the "Alice in Wonderland" sight on the island of BonAire in 1996.

"The Mayan people from the Yucatan Peninsula are really nice people," explained Eddie. "Really religious, very family-oriented people. On Sunday night in the square is a local thing, where all the people come out after church. The whole town is there; thousands of people. The bands are playing. The little girls are running around in their lace dresses; the little boys dressed up in their church clothes. It's a big family thing. It's really neat to see. And it's always on Sunday nights."

While the couple finds Cozumel to be their most beautiful diving vacation spot, Bonaire a small island near Venezuela, appears to have been the most fascinating.

"When I came back from Bonaire, I had a whole new perspective on things I had never even considered before," said Eddie. "When I went down there, we were a long way from home. When I got down there, and saw the language barrier, man, I realized that people here in this country can only speak English, and we are at a disadvantage when we are in other countries because people in other countries, such as Bonaire, and some of those other countries, they can speak three and four languages, including English. If you're an American, and you can only speak English, that's the end of what you can deal with."

island of BonAire
s at one of the slave
near the salt ponds
arly 1800's.

Aside from the joys of negotiating around reefs, traveling to exotic diving locations and getting Jo to dive with him, Eddie said that it was an inland trip that has meant the most to him.

"I was called one day over at my job by the lady who runs the summer day camp at Stennis (Space Center). She called to ask me to speak to the children," explained Eddie. "The next day I went home and got a tank and my dive bag and put my gear in it and went over and talked with the children about diving."

Eddie said that he didn't get the children's attention right away, ut after a few minutes the children became increasingly interested as his presentation pro-essed and the children got to touch and handle the equipment.

A few days after the talk with the children, Eddie received a card in the mail

Eddie prepares diving gear for upcoming trip to Bimini in May.

that he keeps as a reminder of his sharing experience with the children. The card reads: We thank you Mr. Scuba Diver Dude. We enjoyed it! "That was like the neatest thing other than having Jo dive with me," said Eddie.

Diving is Refreshing and Rejuvenating

"I get excited when it gets close to the time to go (diving)," said Jo. "You are refreshed. You are sitting in the office like for six months, and everything is like closing in on you, and you want to get out. So you get away and go diving, and you come back to work refreshed.

"It's going to be relaxing," she says of the upcoming seven-day sailboat diving adventure in the Bahamas the couple will embark on in May.

"By the time I go on a diving trip, I need to be recharged," said Eddie. "And the diving places we go has a lot to do with that, because it's away from everyday life. When we go diving, we mostly go on trips just to do that. We'll do the night life and the shopping, but now it's like we have to almost squeeze that in because we dive everyday. Diving is the thing that recharges me.

"At one point, a while back, I went on a diving trip and I went diving four times a day for four days," says Eddie about his enjoyment for the sport. "I went and had three breakfasts at one time, and I slept for two days, and I dove sixteen times in four days. Usually it takes a week or more to do that. "I look at it a little differently than I did a couple years ago," he explained. "I was diving a lot but still wasn't diving enough for myself. I was diving with a lot of different people. I slowed it down a lot, although I still do quite a bit. I dive more with Jo now than I did before. I would dive with her when it was time to dive with her; then I'd run off and dive other times with other people. But I won't do that much anymore. I'd rather dive with her."

"He says that when we are away diving, we're really married," said Jo. "It's just us. We're together doing something we really enjoy doing."

"Jo gets me in and out of the country," Eddie teases. "Jo handles the passports, the ticketing, the travel setup. She's the travel agent, the business manager, secretary and treasurer. I deal with the dive gear. It's like a team thing."

"Diving has enhanced my quality of life," says Jo. "Diving allows me to travel. I wouldn't have been to so many different places without diving. I love it!"

MS

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- Inability to urinate
- Difficulty starting or stopping the urine flow
- The need to urinate frequently, especially at night
- Blood in the urine
- Painful or burning urination
- Continuing pain in lower back, pelvis or upper thighs

What should I do?

Early detection is extremely critical. After 40, a man should have a digital rectal examination with his regular annual physical checkup and an annual prostate-specific antigen (PSA) blood test at 50 and older. If you are experiencing any of the symptoms described here, contact your physician immediately.

For more information or a physician referral call:
865-DOCS (3627)

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African-American Families & Adoption

by Calvin and Herta Smith

This is not about rescue, so as to feel good when the child lights up with a smile. This is not about the comfort of compassion. This is about hard work, struggling with ripped families and children in clouds of pain, anger dancing in their hearts in the turmoil of a world made crazy. This is caring, yes, but also what is just, what should be demanded. It takes love and a certain measure of courage. And in the simple act of person helping person, it becomes extraordinary.

All dressed and ready to go out!

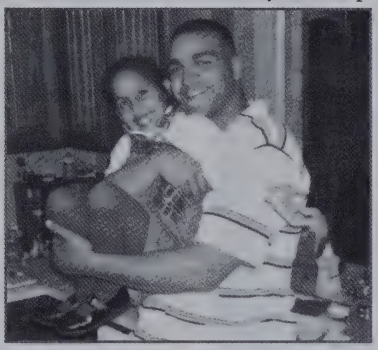
1996 - our children are all grown and doing well, one a banker, another a special education teacher and the youngest is in the United States Marine Corps.

Both of us have always enjoyed working with children and over the years volunteered with Little League, tutoring programs and Special Olympics. In 1996 we became involved with CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates). Currently, there are 556 CASA programs in all 50 states. Approximately 33,000 volunteers work with the single purpose of helping 116,000 abused and neglected children. It required 25 hours of intensive training and then you were sworn in by the Court to serve as Advocates for abused and neglected children under the supervision of Child Protective Services. You are that child's voice in court. As Advocates you bring a fresh and objective community perspective to the juvenile court system. As advocates, it was our job to ensure that the children's needs came first and they did not become just another statistic.

Let's quickly examine some of the statistics concerning at risk children. Over 70% of persons serving time in jail for serious offenses were abused and/or neglected as children. Nationwide there are approximately 500,000 children in foster care. An estimated 100,000 children will be unable to return home. Many of these children will remain in the system until they are 18 and are then "turned out". Over 90% of the children "turned out" return to the system through the criminal and/or welfare venue. Not a pretty picture is it?

But there is hope, and organizations such as CASA are making a difference. Through the CASA volunteer program we met two little girls, sisters 16 months apart in age. They were left by their biological mother in an abandoned warehouse for several days at a time. This warehouse was frequented by homeless people, many addicted to alcohol and drugs. The windows were broken out, no heat, no toilet facilities, little food and even less care. In October of 1996 these two little girls were turned over to the police by two of the homeless men living

in the warehouse. Their mother was gone for several days and the children were wet, sick, cold and hungry. They were taken into custody by Child Protective Services and placed in a children's home and Herta was called to serve as their Advocate by her CASA supervisor. The first bit of information we received was that their mother is addicted to drugs, their fathers were in jail and their grandmother was also in jail for drug related activity.



A New Big Brother!

Where do we go from here? "This is not about rescue as to feel good when the child lights up with a smile." Our first encounter with these little "street urchins" was at the children's home where they lived with so many other abandoned, abused and neglected children. Even though we did not admit it for awhile, it was love at first sight for us and our grown children. We knew that we wanted to be more than their Advocate in court.

Policy dictates you cannot apply to Child Protective Services for a foster/adoptive parent certification if you are an Advocate in the CASA program. We took a leave of absence from CASA and discovered that even to be considered parents for these two little ones we had to take ten weeks of Parenting and Partnering Classes sponsored by Child Protective Services, and there was no guarantee that we would get these two little sisters. While attending these classes we shared life experiences with our classmates and we realized all over again that there are considerable numbers of people who give care and love to the abandoned, abused and neglected children in our welfare system. However, one thing stuck out like a sore thumb. Ninety (90%) percent of the class participants were Caucasian and approximately seventy five (75%) percent of the children in care are African-American youngsters. Where are the people who look like these children? We are still asking that question and some of the answers are difficult. Many professionals believe that African-American families are working very hard raising their "own" children and do not realize that they have the capacity to provide for one of these at risk children. Could you? Would you? Think about it!

The River carried me to Akki,
the water carrier. Akki the water
carrier lifted me up in the kindness
of his heart. Akki the carrier
raised me as his own son.

This passage was inscribed in the tomb of a Babylonian king and shows that caring for needy children has been a tradition since ancient time. This ancient practice is found in our society today; we call it foster care and adoption. With parents who believe in them and who can provide an appropriate cultural environment, at risk african-American children can be helped to realize their full potential and become successful adults capable of forming lasting relationships. The debate has raged for years on whether or not a Caucasian family can raise African-American children with an appropriate sense of their cultural heritage. It is now a commonly held belief that a good home is vital and a good home with people that look like you is best. Most agencies try to place african-American children in african-American homes.

Many old barriers no longer exist. Single people can adopt, people who

Fairy Princess

require financial assistance can adopt, you do not have to own your own home to adopt. Agencies realize that many different kinds of people can be loving, effective parents. Prospective parents should be stable and sensitive, able to love a child and possess understanding and patience.

African Americans who have adopted are adoption's most vocal advocates. They say adoption is a rewarding and enriching experience. Some-times there is a wait until a match is made but most adopters agree that the wait was worth the end result.

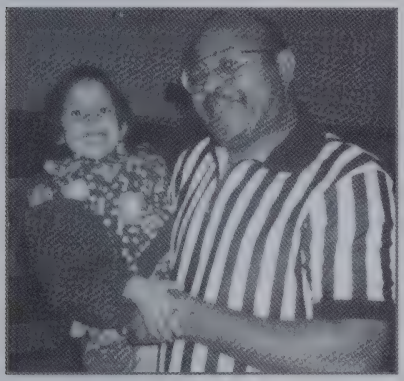
Every foster/adoptive process is alike in many ways and very different in others. We had not considered adoption at this stage of our lives and yet the next thing we knew we completed the Child Protective Services course and within three weeks of receiving our certification, our two little CASA girls were up for foster placement. Child Protective Services called and asked if we would take them. YES! We picked them up right before Memorial Day and whisked off to visit family and friends in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. Their first trip to the hairdresser, first vacation! First trip to the beach! The first time in a nice hotel; little cousins to play with! Their first bathing suits, their first party dresses, their first wedding, first new shoes, first new beds, bubble bath and new toothbrushes, too many firsts to list. We all enjoyed their excitement over each new experience.

Bay St. Louis is our home, and we wanted our family to meet the children. All of this had been discussed at length with family members and we had received their blessing. The little ones started to realize what it meant to have family and friends that care and protect. It was the beginning of a lifetime of memories for them and for us. Almost everything was a first!

One of our favorite firsts was Halloween 1997. The girls had never been Trick or Treating. They had never had a costume. They were told by their biological mother that they were not invited to Halloween. We made sure they were invited that year. Picture it! A ballerina, a fairy princess and 6'6" Calvin dressed as the dead referee, complete with glowing skull for a head. The fairy princess soon realized that carrying a wand and a bag of candy was just too much work. The dead referee ended up carrying the wand. It is a picture in our memories that we will treasure forever.

Firsts have become fewer since May 23, 1997 when they came to live with us and some firsts were harder to achieve than others. Bathing suits and party dresses were easy. What do you do with a child, even though she was six, and had never been to school? She had been tested at the children's home and we were told, that at best, she was a low average achiever. We decided that she was not a low achiever but a child who had had few opportunities. You must remember, many of these children are tested at the worst possible

time of their life and are traumatized and frightened. Read the professional's reports, but use your own good judgement when it comes to making decisions about school and care. After reading all the reports, we decided not to have her tested further. We also did not want her to turn seven in kindergarten so we petitioned the school board to let her into first grade. They looked at us as though we had lost our minds. Remember the old saying "Where there is a will there is a way!" Having a will has never been a problem for the Smith family! We convinced the principal at our neighborhood elementary school to let her try first grade. Was it difficult? Yes it was. We spent hours every day helping her catch up, hours taking her places, working on numbers and social skills. The first weeks in school were hard for all of us. Our little one had never had other children to play with, to learn with, and was very shy. Our hearts ached for her. She was afraid she was not as smart as the other kids. Remember Where there is a will there is a way! We convinced her that she was as smart as any kid in that class; we focused in on her successes and never dwelled on the failures. She has blossomed into an honor roll student, who now reads on a second grade level and has become quite the social butterfly.



Helping Dad Referee

Hard work, massive amounts of love and patience, time and attention have paid off for our two little ones. They are now outgoing, smiling, hugging, kissing little girls. They see us and come running. We usually get a hug every time they pass by and regale us with stories about their busy days.

What does this have to do with African-American families and adoption? Quite frankly, it speaks volumes to what we must do to secure the future for at risk African-American children. We believe the African-American community must rise to the occasion of fostering a relationship with the children who have been cast off to the system. The phrase "it takes a village" has become an "in" phrase. What does it mean? To us it means taking action

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in whatever capacity you can; foster, adopt, mentor, tutor, volunteer! These at risk children are part of our village and yet, thousands of them are languishing in the "system", outside the gates and cannot get in. The System is not a substitute for a home and a family. There are many people who truly care and yet have not acted. Why? Here are a few of the reasons you hear, "I cannot afford to adopt a child." Wrong - there is help with care and legal fees incurred by adoption. We want to adopt a baby. That rules out 80% of all African-American children up for adoption! We have dear friends who tried to adopt an infant for many years. After meeting and interacting with our two "older, at risk" little girls they recently adopted a three-year-old boy who has taken over their hearts. Explore the possibility in your mind and especially in your heart of sharing your life with a child who has been left with no one and nothing. Try to imagine our two little ones, sick, cold, hungry, frightened and abandoned in a warehouse where there were rats ("big mousies" as the baby of the two called them), spiders and other vermin to frighten and injure them. Then one day they wake up living in a nice home with all of the amenities. They said Mom/Dad "we are rich". We have a home, food, clothes, schooling and medical care. We must, as a community and as individuals, save these children from traveling their life's

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path alone and unwanted.

We are reaping the rewards of having these little people in our home and in our lives. We look forward to being able to

Calvin and Herta on the dance floor

file formal adoption papers in the very near future so that they never have to question where they belong. They belong with us, the family that loves them and cherishes them for themselves. The family that, hopefully, will be able to motivate and challenge them to be their very best.

Our philosophy has always been "Each one reach one". Trust us, extend yourself to one of these youngsters and they will, as our two have done, walk on your heart and change your life forever.

Cavin and Herta Smith reside in Carrolton, Texas.

Titles For Further Reading And Resources For Information

Berry, Helen. Creating New Linkages for the Adoption of Black Children:

Friends of Black Children Project, A Guidebook. Chapel Hill, NC School of Social Work, University of North Carolina, 1984

Collier, Aldore. "Veteran Actor Opens His House and Heart to Ten Children." Ebony 46, No. 2 (December 1990): 86-90

Gank, Larry, M. and Ellen Saalbert, editors. Black Adoption programs: Pacesetter Practice. Ann Arbor, MI: National Child Welfare Training Center, University Michigan, 1984.

"Mississippi Kids Finding Homes, Thanks to Preacher's Wife." Jet 71, no. 17 (January 1987): 37

People to contact if interested in Foster/Adopt, Mentoring:

- **Local Child Protective Services**
- **Local CASA**
- **Ministers for Adoption**
  P. O. 1078
  Jackson, MS 39205
  Attn: Linda West
  (601) 352-6671
- **One Church One Child Program**
  P. O. Box 352
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GUEST WORD

Family and the Environment

by Bruce Northridge

In what ways is this issue's theme of "Family" linked to "the Environment?"

To begin, both are celebrated in April. Since 1970, April 20th has been celebrated as "Earth Day." It can be viewed as an effort to educate the public (us) on the impact each our families has on the environment...and vice versa.

Indeed, the entire "family of Man" is having a serious impact on the health of the planet - especially when we consider such issues as overpopulation and unsustainable development. We should re-read Genesis and consider our God-given responsibilities as stewards of His creation - especially in view of such man-made problems as habitat destruction, loss of wetlands, over-fishing, and species extinction. I strongly recommend reading Vice President Gore's book, *Earth in the Balance,* to educate ourselves and to remind ourselves of the issues we face, and should not ignore - "local" skirmishes) e.q., landfills, wastewater treatment), "regional" battles (e.q., the "dead zone" in the Gulf of Mexico), and "strategic" conflicts (e.q., global warming).

We should each ask ourselves: What impact is our family having on the environment? Do we conserve energy (electricity, heating/cooling our homes, gas for our cars)? Do we conserve water? Do we recycle? Do we stop and consider what 10 things, 20 things, or 100 things we could do to follow the teachings of our Native American brothers to "walk softly on the Earth?"

On the other hand, it is prudent for each of us to ask: What impact is the environment having on our family? We have only recently begun to recognize the magnitude of the health threats to our children caused by the environment. According to the American Lung Association, asthma affects 4.2 million children, and is now the leading cause of hospital admissions for our nation's children. The number one disease-related cause of death in children is cancer. And the rate continues to rise. The National Cancer Institute reports that bone cancer increased 40% in boys and 33% in girls from 1979 to 1991. Eight thousand children under the age of 14 were diagnosed with cancer in 1993. What's going on? These children with asthma and cancer do not smoke cigarettes. They don't work in chemical factories. And it can't be the result of some pollution from 20 years ago. Instead, we're finding out that the environment is becoming more and more toxic, and it is affecting our children younger and younger - even before they are born.

There is a process in nature called

bio-accumulation. In our industrial society, many toxic chemicals are released into our environment; they can travel great distances, and end up in the water or on the ground. The fish in the water and the animals that eat the grass ingest them. Every animal up the food chain that eats the smaller fish and animals "inherits" all of that fish/animal's load of toxic chemicals. We absorb low-level doses of toxins (poisons) into our bodies throughout our lifetimes. The dose we accumulate is passed on. A woman's eggs can be affected; a man's sperm can be affected. The result can be birth defects. Toxins such as dioxin and mercury cross the placenta and affect the fetus. Toxins are transferred to nursing infants through breast milk.

These poisons affect our babies' developing brains, and we wonder why there's such a large problem with learning disabilities and attention deficit disorder.

Why? Dioxin is released into the environment primarily from the bleaching of paper pulp and from incineration processes. Paper mills that use chlorine to bleach paper, and manufacturing plants that use chlorine to make pesticides or plastics are major sources of dioxin. The largest source of mercury is also incineration, mostly from garbage and medical waste incinerators. BUT IT DOES NOT HAVE TO BE. We can have white paper to write on without chlorine bleaching. We can manage our garbage and hazardous wastes in ways that do not require burning. The cause of this massive poisoning of our environment and our families is the failure of a regulatory system that believes/believed that exposure to a little bit of toxic chemicals wouldn't hurt anyone. We now know this is not true. We must act - for our children's sake and for our future's sake.

For many years, the Environmental Movement that is celebrated on April 20th was viewed as a collection of "tree-huggers", mostly preppie white folks who were out to save the spotted owl, or save the eagle, or save the whales, or save the dolphins. Not so long ago, THINGS CHANGED. One of the events that helped change the Movement was the National Environmental People of Color Leadership Summit held at Xavier University in New Orleans in 1994. As a white male, it was my first experience as a minority at a meeting on the environment. People of color took charge and claimed their stake in the Environmental issue. Their goal was to build a Grassroots Movement around environmental issues, but where the environment was defined as "where we work, live and play."

We saw Red - Native Americans told us of the dangers of having nuclear industries on/near their reservations.

We saw Brown - Mexican Americans complained of the poisoning of their family members exposed to pesticides while working in the fields.

We saw Black - African Americans told us of the ill effects of hazardous waste sites and incinerators in their communities.

For example, Ms. Charlotte Keys described how she organized the black community of Columbia, Mississippi, to become JPAP (Jesus People Against Pollution) to fight for cleanup of a Superfund site that was causing cancers, birth defects, and skin rashes in her neighborhood.

Another struggle that was reported was the fight against siting a medical waste incinerator in Moss Point, a predominantly black community.

Eventually, the cries of anguish and anger and despair became a resounding chorus. There is now a term, "Environmental Justice," that describes the effort to protect any community from bearing a disproportionate share of the burden of society's toxic waste. The book, *Dumping on Dixie* by Dr. Robert Bullard, documents how the disproportionate share is being dumped on people-of-color communities. The problem is recognized in Executive Order #12898 signed by President Clinton in July 1995.

One of the regional groups helping communities to organize to fight for environmental justice is SOC (Southern Organizing Committee for Economic & Social Justice, P.O. Box 811, Birmingham, AL 35201), which has its roots in the civil rights movement of the South.

One of the state groups helping to keep people informed on environmental issues that could affect your family and your community is ECO-MS (Environmental Coalition of Mississippi, P.O. Box 10006, Jackson, MS 39286).

You may choose to celebrate Earth Day today by watching "Free Willy" with your kids. But tomorrow, I urge you to begin learning what you can about environmental issues...for your family's sake.

Bruce Northridge heads the Peace and Justice Ministry at St. Rose de Lima Catholic Church in Bay St. Louis. He has been involved in environmental issues on the Gulf Coast for the past twenty years.

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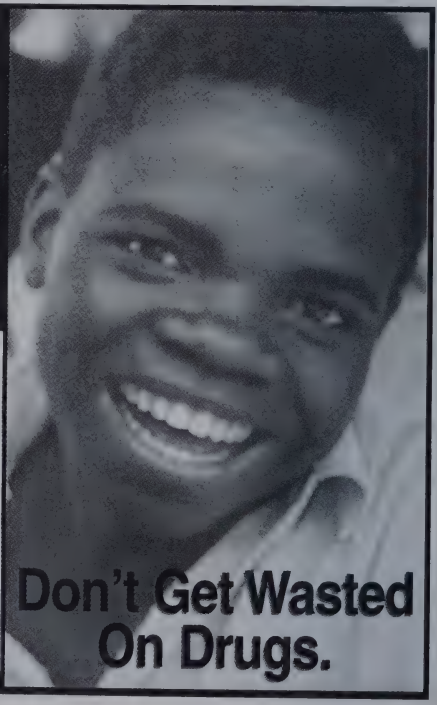

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Jackson State University President Dr. James E. Lyons, Sr. (right) accepts a $5000 check from attorney Alveno Castilla, on behalf of Watkins, Ludlam, Winter and Stennis, P.A., making the Jackson law firm the first JSU Corporate Dollars for Scholars program donor. The funds will go toward the establishment of a $1million endowed scholarship fund for academically-talented students. On the left is JSU Development Foundation Board of Directors Chairman Johnnie Esters.

"UNDERSTANDING THE BASICS OF INVESTING: *Effective Strategies for Women*"

On Thursday, May 7, Bridget Weatherly, and investment broker with A.G. Edwards, Inc. will conduct a free financial planning seminar at Coast Books in Downtown Gulfport. "Understanding the Basics of Investing: Effective Strategies for Women" is the topic which covers investment strategies, how to work effectively with an investment professional, and affordable and convenient ways to build education and retirement funds. Seating is limited; interested persons should call Lou or Kaye at 228/864-5577 by May 5 to reserve a seat.

KPC JUNIOR CONFERENCE DRAWS 300 YOUNG PEOPLE

Approximately three hundred young people participated in a three-day conference of the junior divisions of the Knights of Peter Claver and Ladies Auxiliary held recently in Biloxi. Junior Knights and Junior Daughters from Georgia, South Carolina, Florida, Alabama and Mississippi performed skits and participated in a banner contest and workshops to the conference theme, Reflect the Son: Mirror His Love.

"By all accounts, including surveys and feedback from the children, this was the best junior conference in some time," said Rhonda Labat, a junior daughter advisor and one of several conference organizers.

The conference took place March 6 - 8 at the Treasure Bay Casino Hotel. The conference was hosted by St. James Court 6 and Pere Blanc Council 6 of St. Rose de Lima Catholic Church in Bay St. Louis and Court and Council 4 from St. Peter the Apostle Catholic Church of Pascagoula.

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